

"I thought at first I would walk," was the reply, "but I rather think I will stop at Robinson's and get him to send me over."

"I guess you won't do nothin' o' the sort," declared David. "Tom's all hitched to take you over, an' when you're ready jest ring the bell."

"You're awfully kind," said John gratefully, "but I don't know when I shall be coming home."

"Come back when you git a good ready," said Mr. Harum. "If you keep him an' the hoss waitin' a spell, I guess they won't take cold this weather."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE Verjoos house, of old red brick, stands about a hundred feet back from the north side of the Lake Road, on the south shore of the lake. Since its original construction a *porte cochère* has been built upon the front. A very broad hall, from which rises the stairway with a double turn and landing, divides the main body of the house through the middle. On the left, as one enters, is the great drawing room; on the right a parlor opening into a library; and beyond, the dining room, which looks out over the lake. The hall opens in the rear upon a broad, covered veranda, facing the lake, with a flight of steps to a lawn which slopes down to the lake shore, a distance of some hundred and fifty yards.

John had to pass through a little flock of young people who stood near and about the entrance to the drawing room, and having given his package of music to the maid in waiting, with a request that it be put upon the piano, he mounted the stairs to deposit his hat and coat, and then went down.

In the south end of the drawing room were some twenty people sitting and standing about, most of them the elders of the families who constituted society in Homeville, many of whom John had met, and nearly all of whom he knew

by sight and name. On the edge of the group, and halfway down the room, were Mrs. Verjoos and her younger daughter, who gave him a cordial greeting; and the elder lady was kind enough to repeat her daughter's morning assurances of regret that they were out on the occasion of his call.

"I trust you have been as good as your word," said Miss Clara, "and brought some music."

"Yes, it is on the piano," he replied, looking across the room to where the instrument stood.

The girl laughed. "I wish," she said, "you could have heard what Mr. Harum said this morning about your singing, particularly his description of *The Lost Chord*, and I wish that I could repeat it just as he gave it."

"It's about a feller sittin' one day by the org'n," came a voice from behind John's shoulder, so like David's as fairly to startle him, "an' not feelin' exac'ly right—kind o' tired an' out o' sorts, an' not knowin' jest where he was drivin' at—jest joggin' along with a loose rein fer quite a piece, an' so on; an' then, by an' by, strikin' right into his gait an' goin' on stronger an' stronger, an' fin'ly finishin' up with an A—men that carries him quarter way 'round the track 'fore he c'n pull up." They all laughed except Miss Verjoos, whose gravity was unbroken, save that behind the dusky windows of her eyes, as she looked at John, there was for an instant a gleam of mischievous drollery.

"Good evening, Mr. Lenox," she said. "I am very glad to see you," and hardly waiting for his response, she turned and walked away.

"That is Juliet all over," said her sister.

"You would not think to see her ordinarily that she was given to that sort of thing, but once in a while, when she feels like it—well—pranks! She is the funniest creature that ever lived, I believe, and can mimic and imitate any mortal creature. She sat in the carriage this morning, and one might have fancied from her expression that she hardly heard a word, but I haven't a doubt that she could repeat every syllable that was uttered. Oh, here come the Bensons and their musicians."

John stepped back a pace or two toward the end of the room, but was presently recalled and presented to the newcomers. After a little talk the Bensons settled themselves in the corner at the lower end of the room, where seats were placed for the two musicians, and our friend took a seat near where he had been standing. The violinist adjusted his folding music rest. Miss Clara stepped over to the entrance door and put up her finger at the young people in the hall. "After the music begins," she said, with a shake of the head, "if I hear one sound of giggling or chattering, I will send every one of you young heathen home. Remember now! This isn't your party at all."

"But, Clara, dear," said Sue Tenaker (aged fifteen), "if we are very good and quiet do you think they would play for us to dance a little by and by?"

"Impudence!" exclaimed Miss Clara, giving the girl's cheek a playful slap and going back to her place. Miss Verjoos came in and took a chair by her sister. Mrs. Benson leaned forward and raised her eyebrows at Miss Clara, who took a quick survey of the room and nodded in return.

Herr Schlitz seated himself on the piano chair, pushed it a little back, drew it a little forward to the original place, looked under the piano at the pedals, took out his handkerchief and wiped his face and hands, and after arpeggioing up and down the key-board, swung into a waltz of Chopin's (Opus 34, Number 1), a favorite of our friend's, and which he would have thoroughly enjoyed—for it was splendidly played—if he had not been uneasily apprehensive that he might be asked to sing after it. And while on some accounts he would have been glad of the opportunity to "have it over," he felt a cowardly sense of relief when the violinist came forward for the next number. There had been enthusiastic applause at the north end of the room, and more or less clapping of hands at the south end, but not enough to impel the pianist to supplement his performance at the time. The violin number was so well received that Mr. Fairman added a little minuet of Boccherini's without accompaniment, and then John felt that his time had surely come. But he had to sit, drawing long breaths, through a Liszt fantasie on themes from Faust before his suspense was ended by Miss Clara, who was apparently mistress of ceremonies and who said to him, "Will you sing now, Mr. Lenox?"

He rose and went to the end of the room where the pianist was sitting. "I have been asked to sing," he said to that gentleman. "Can I induce you to be so kind as to play for me?"

"I am sure he will," said Mrs. Benson, looking at Herr Schlitz.

"Oh, yes, I blay for you if you vant," he said. "Where is your moosic?" They went over

to the piano. "Oh, ho! Jensen, Lassen, Helmund, Grieg—you zing dem?"

"Some of them," said John. The pianist opened the Jensen album.

"You want to zing one of dese?" he asked.

"As well as anything," replied John, who had changed his mind a dozen times in the last ten minutes and was ready to accept any suggestion.

"Ver' goot," said the other. "Ve dry dis: Lehn deine wang' an meine Wang'." His face brightened as John began to sing the German words. In a measure or two the singer and player were in perfect accord, and as the former found his voice the ends of his fingers grew warm again. At the end of the song the applause was distributed about as after the Chopin waltz.

"Sehr schön!" exclaimed Herr Schlitz, looking up and nodding; "you must zing zome more," and he played the first bars of Marie, am Fenster sitzest du, humming the words under his breath, and quite oblivious of any one but himself and the singer.

"Zierlich," he said when the song was done, reaching for the collection of Lassen. "Mit deinen blauen Augen," he hummed, keeping time with his hands, but at this point Miss Clara came across the room, followed by her sister.

"Mrs. Tenaker," she said, laughing, "asked me to ask you, Mr. Lenox, if you wouldn't please sing something they could understand."

"I have a song I should like to hear you sing," said Miss Verjoos. "There is an obligato for violin and we have a violinist here. It is a beautiful song—Tosti's Beauty's Eyes. Do you know it?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Will you sing it for me?" she asked.

"With the greatest pleasure," he answered.

Once, as he sang the lines of the song, he looked up. Miss Verjoos was sitting with her elbows on the arm of her chair, her cheek resting upon her clasped hands and her dusky eyes were fastened upon his face. As the song concluded she rose and walked away. Mrs. Tenaker came over to the piano and put out her hand.

"Thank you so much for your singing, Mr. Lenox," she said. "Would you like to do an old woman a favor?"

"Very much so," said John, smiling and looking first at Mrs. Tenaker and then about the room, "but there are no old women here as far as I can see."

"Very pretty, sir, very pretty," she said, looking very graciously at him. "Will you sing Annie Laurie for me?"

"With all my heart," he said, bowing. He looked at Herr Schlitz, who shook his head.

"Let me play it for you," said Mrs. Benson, coming over to the piano.

"Where do you want it?" she asked, modulating softly from one key to another.

"I think D flat will be about right," he replied. "Kindly play a little bit of it."

The sound of the symphony brought most of even the young people into the drawing room. At the end of the first verse there was a subdued rustle of applause, a little more after the second, and at the end of the song so much of a burst of approval as could be produced by the audience.

Mrs. Benson looked up into John's face and smiled.

"We appear to have scored the success of the evening," she said with a touch of sarcasm. Miss Clara joined them.

"What a dear old song that is!" she said. "Did you see Aunt Charlie (Mrs. Tenaker) wiping her eyes?—and that lovely thing of Tosti's! We are ever so much obliged to you, Mr. Lenox."

John bowed his acknowledgments.

"Will you take Mrs. Benson out to supper? There is a special table for you musical people at the east end of the veranda."

"Is this merely a segregation or a distinction?" said John as they sat down.

"We shall have to wait developments to decide that point, I should say," replied Mrs. Benson. "I suppose that fifth place was put on the off chance that Mr. Benson might be of our party, but," she said, with a short laugh, "he is probably nine fathoms deep in a flirtation with Sue Tenaker. He shares Artemas Ward's tastes, who said, you may remember, that he liked little girls—big ones too."

A maid appeared with a tray of eatables, and presently another with a tray on which were glasses and a bottle of Pommery *sec*. "Miss Clara's compliments," she said.

"What do you think now?" asked Mrs. Benson, laughing.

"Distinctly a distinction, I should say," he replied.

"Das ist nicht so schlecht," grunted Herr Schlitz as he put half a *pâté* into his mouth, "bot I vould brefer beer."

"The music has been a great treat to me," remarked John. "I have heard nothing of the sort for two years."

"You have quite contributed your share of the entertainment," said Mrs. Benson.

"You and I together," he responded, smiling.

"You have got a be-oodifool voice," said Herr Schlitz, speaking with a mouthful of salad, "und you zing ligh a moosician, und you bro-nounce your vorts very goot."

"Thank you," said John.

After supper there was more singing in the drawing room, but it was not of a very classical order. Something short and taking for violin and piano was followed by an announcement from Herr Schlitz.

"I zing you a zong," he said. The worthy man "breferred beer," but had, perhaps, found the wine quicker in effect, and in a tremendous bass voice he roared out, *Im tiefen Keller sitz' ich hier, auf einem Fass voll Reben*, which, if not wholly understood by the audience, had some of its purport conveyed by the threefold repetition of "trinke" at the end of each verse. Then a deputation waited upon John, to ask in behalf of the girls and boys if he knew and could sing Solomon Levi.

"Yes," he said, sitting down at the piano, "if you'll all sing with me," and it came to pass that that classic, followed by *Bring Back my Bonnie to Me*, *Paddy Duffy's Cart*, *There's Music in the Air*, and sundry other ditties dear to all hearts, was given by "the full strength of the company" with such enthusiasm that even Mr. Fairman was moved to join in with his violin; and when the *Soldier's Farewell* was given, Herr Schlitz would

have sung the windows out of their frames had they not been open. Altogether, the evening's programme was brought to an end with a grand climax.

"Thank you very much," said John as he said good night to Mrs. Verjoos. "I don't know when I have enjoyed an evening so much."

"Thank *you* very much," she returned graciously. "You have given us all a great deal of pleasure."

"Yes," said Miss Verjoos, giving her hand with a mischievous gleam in her half-shut eyes, "I was enchanted with Solomon Levi."